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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how levels of cognitive development affect participants' "adequateness" or ability to function in adventure groups. Twenty-three women who were newly elected or appointed officers of a university campus sorority participated in the study. Prior to the group experience, participants completed a paragraph-completion exercise to assess cognitive level. Large group activities were conducted at the beginning of the day. Then participants were divided into three groups by cognitive level. The cognitive levels reflect three types of cognitive development, i.e., dualism (with a simplistic dichotomy and conformity), transition (beginning to think in more than one way and to question authority), and multiplism (accepting different views). Small group activities consisted of problem-solving situations based on Project Adventure style challenges. Pre- and post-test group assessment indicated that the dualistic thinkers experienced the greatest increase in positive perception of group function. The multiplistic thinkers experienced a small increase. The transition group had the least positive group experience and had a slight decrease in their perception of group effectiveness. Comparison of a self-evaluation scale between groups and across pre-test and post-tests yielded results similar to that of the group assessment. The concept of "adequateness" influences the individual's capacity to understand and cooperate in challenging group activities. (LP)

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Why Johnny Can't Cooperate: Cognitive Development and The Concept of "Adequateness"[1]

Jim Fullerton and Sue Wells

Abstract—Many adventure programs have identified an increase in "teamwork" and "group cooperation" skills as potential benefits of participation. However, participants and practitioners alike should realize that these are not guaranteed results, but rather goals to pursue. There are many reasons why individuals may not cooperate or function well within a group. One important reason is a resistance to cooperation that can be identified by William Perry and his colleagues at Harvard. Using their model of cognitive (i.e., intellectual and ethical) development, a research study was conducted on a group that participated in a "Project Adventure" style challenge course. The results have implications about individual and group capabilities and "adequateness" that may be of interest to anyone who works with groups.

Introduction

High adventure and higher education have a lot to contribute and a lot to learn from each other. Parallel work is being done in the field and in the classroom regarding human development.Outward Bound began in this country in 1962 and Project Adventure began in 1971. Both of these programs strive to help participants grow and develop as individuals through a system of challenge and support.

William Perry conducted research at Harvard University beginning in the 1950's that culminated in a scheme of cognitive (i.e., intellectual and ethical) development in college students. This model explains how the young adult reasons, thinks, or makes meaning of experiences. It also identifies how individuals can grow and develop through a transition between levels of understanding and interpretation of their world.

The research study described in this paper applied Perry's model of cognitive development

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to participants in a "Project Adventure" style group challenge course. The results underlined the importance of bridging the gap between higher education theory and high adventure practice. While both approaches deal with how participants may grow and develop as individuals, in combination they become much more meaningful and potent: Higher education theory enhances the practice of high adventure, and the practice of high adventure supports higher education theory.

This research project helped to satisfy the academic requirements for a graduate level educational psychology class that was taken by the authors in the spring semester of 1990. More significantly, it became the pilot study for what has become the Group Challenge Experience program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which is jointly administered by the Office of Campus Recreation and the Campus Activities and Programs Office, and has served over 500 participants in the 1990 and 1991.

Definition of Terms

1. **Cognitive Development.** Through years of research, William Perry and colleagues at Harvard University described different levels of cognitive (i.e., intellectual and ethical) thinking as "stages" or "positions," and development between these levels was by definition transitional movement between these levels. To summarize the major stages of thinking referred to in this model.

2. **Dualism.** Dualistic thinkers operate out of absolutes. Things are right or wrong, black or white, good or bad. They believe knowledge is quantitative, authorities know right answers. People at this stage tend to conform. (This is a very common stage for teenagers.)

3. **Transition.** Transitional thinkers between dualism and multiplism are beginning to think there is more than one way to do things. They are beginning to question authority. They are also oppositional, and define themselves by opposing others. (This is a very common stage for college students, and is the level at which they resist cooperation.)

4. **Multiplism.** Multiplistic thinkers can accept different points of view without taking it as an attack upon themselves. They believe their self is distinct of others, but are still figuring out who they are.

5. **Relativism.** Relativistic thinkers analyze and compare. They believe knowledge is qualitative, dependent on context.

6. **Commitments in Relativism.** People at this stage will make commitments in terms of an affirmation, choice, or decision about deepest values. These commitments are made in the awareness of relativism and contradictions in life.

7. **Avoidance.** Within the cognitive development model are also some terms that describe the avoidance of development:

   (a) Temporizing—postponement of movement for a year or more;

   (b) Escape—alienation, abandonment of responsibility; and

   (c) Retreat—avoidance of complexity and ambivalence by regression to dualism colored by hatred of otherness.

8. **The Concept of "Adequateness."** "Adequatio" or "Adequateness" is the term used by the

late economist E. F. Schumacker (author of *Small is Beautiful* and *A Guide for the Perplexed*) to describe an individual's capacity to understand something. Through the concept of Adequateness he explains that the interpretation of knowledge is dependent on the capacity of the knower, or "the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known." This concept is particularly helpful when considering Perry's different levels of understanding, and realizing how different people typically operate at different levels of understanding.

Methodology Sample

Our subjects consisted of 23 women who were newly elected or appointed officers of the Phi Mu sorority at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This sorority is a social and philanthropic Greek organization that was reorganized with an entirely new membership a year earlier. There were three academic standings represented in the sample: (a) eight freshmen, (b) eleven sophomores, and (c) four juniors. The invitation to participate in the study was extended to the elected and appointed officers of the sorority only. Participation in the actual experience and completion of the assessments was completely voluntary.

Measuring Instruments

Three different assessment instruments were used in this study. The first was a paragraph completion exercise which was given in advance to assess their cognitive level so that the participants could be organized into groups of like cognitive level functioning. The second was a "Group Challenge Experience Assessment" to measure perceptions of the group's effectiveness and personal effectiveness within the group on a number of dimensions defining the concept of "team". This was given before and twice after the "Project Adventure" style experience to assess the impact of the experience, and this study served as the basis for the statistical analysis of this study. The third assessment was a simple evaluation and reaction to the experience, and from it was obtained subjective written comments about the experience.

(Note: Copies of the measuring instruments and tabulated results are found at the end of the this paper)

1. **Assessment #1: Paragraph Completion Exercise.**

   A modified version of a paragraph completion exercise created by David Hunt was used to assess the cognitive level of the participants. The exercise consisted of five sentence stems which were open-ended statements, as follows: (a) What I think of rules...; (b) When someone disagrees with me . . . ; (c) When I am uncertain . . . ; (d) When I am criticized . . . ; and (e) When I am told what to do . . . .

   The subject then completed the stem with an additional four to five sentences each. Responses were reviewed and scored by an individual that was trained to score the instrument. Each participant was then assigned a numerical score from 0 to 7 according to their cognitive level of functioning as defined by the developmental stages that were the basis of the instrument.

2. **Assessment #2: Group Challenge Experience Assessment.**

   The Group Challenge Experience Assessment was created from an elaborate definition of "team". It was a self-report instrument that rated perceived effectiveness of group and self on a five-point Likert scale. The four categories defining "team" included communication, relationships, vision, and leadership.

3. **Assessment #3: Group Challenge Experience Evaluation.**

   This evaluation was a modification of the Campus Recreation evaluation for Outdoor Adventures trips. Specific elements of the experience (i.e., the activities, the small groups, the facilitators, planning, and the overall experience) were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. This evaluation also allowed for subjective data to be collected by asking for the best and worst things about the experience, what should be changed, and additional comments or suggestions.

Procedure

The Paragraph Completion exercise was administered to the entire group of elected and appointed officers in the sorority approximately one month before the scheduled date of the actual Group Challenge Experience. After each had been scored and assigned a numerical value, participants were separated into three groups within which they would work during the Group Challenge Experience. After each has been scored and assigned a numerical value, participants were separated into three groups within which they would work during the Group Challenge Experience.

Small groups were made up of individuals scoring within the same range of cognitive level functioning. The groups were separated into ranges from 1.0-1.3, 1.31-1.65, and 1.66-2.2. These scores roughly corresponded to Perry's levels of cognitive development as dualism (1.0-1.3), transitional (1.31-1.65) and multiplism (prelegitimate; 1.66-2.2), and will be discussed as such throughout the rest of this paper.

The dualism group had seven subjects while the other two groups had eight subjects each. Participants were not given any information about how they were grouped or what criteria were used to arrange them in groups.

One week prior to the Group Challenge Experience the three facilitators met with the participants to discuss what kind of clothing to wear, what to bring with them, and, in general, what to expect. The Group Challenge Experience Assessment was also administered at this time to serve as a pre-test baseline for how they perceived the effectiveness of themselves and of their group on "team" components.

The Group Challenge Experience was conducted on March 18, 1990 from 1:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at Pioneers Park in Lincoln, Nebraska. Participants were transported to the site together. Large group activities with all 23 participants were conducted at the beginning of the afternoon as a warm-up, then they were divided into three groups (by cognitive level) with one facilitator per group. The facilitators were not made aware of what cognitive level group had been assigned to them. The facilitators processed each experience as it was completed and as seemed appropriate. The program sequence consisted of the following elements:

- **Introduction (entire group).** The facilitators introduced themselves and gave a brief overview of the physical and mental challenges to come. Participants were encouraged

to "dare to try" but were given the option of challenge by choice. Safety considerations were discussed, including an environmental briefing, identification of objective and subjective hazards, and an explanation of the "stop!" rule.

- **Revealing Persona Experiences and Values (entire group).** Participants passed a volleyball around the circle and took turns stating their name, hometown, most significant personal achievement, and what they thought was the most important component of their organization.

- **Warm-up Touching Activities (entire group).** Explanation of these activities can be found in Project Adventure literature. Warm-up touching activities consisted of: (a) Yurt Circle, (b) Lap Sit, (c) Knots, (d) Group Exclusion, (e) Human Ladder, and (f) Blindfold Walk.

- **Small Group Challenges (active problem-solving).** At this point, small groups were formed according to cognitive levels. Again, explanation of these activities can be found in Project Adventure literature. Small group challenges consisted of: (a) Trust Fall, (b) Spider Web, (c) Traffic Jam, (d) All Aboard, (e) High Beam, and (f) Nitro Crossing.

- **Final Challenge (entire group).** The original idea for a lake canoeing final challenge was scrapped due to cold and windy conditions. Instead, the group's final challenge consisted of a Blindfold Polygon. Again, an explanation of this activity can be found in Project Adventure literature.

- **Closure (entire group).** Participants passed a volleyball around the circle and stated their final thoughts about the experience.

- **Post-assessment (entire group).** After an afternoon of activity, the participants were given the Group Challenge Experience Assessment to complete on their return to campus. The day immediately following the Group Challenge Experience the participants were given the first of two post-assessments. The identical assessment was given again one month after the event. All assessments were completed and returned.

Statistical Analysis

"Group" assessment. Comparing the means between groups across the pre-test and first post-test for how they (subjects) perceived the effectiveness of their group on "team" components, it is clear that the dualists experienced the greatest increase (M = 3.23 to M = 4.47). The multiplistic group also experienced a bit increase (M = 3.72 to M = 4.57) whereas the transition group showed a slight decrease (M = 3.93 to M = 3.86). The transition group mean was significantly below that of the other two groups.

All three groups showed a decrease in means between the first and second post-tests (given a month after the event). The dualists showed the greatest difference (.71) while the transitional group showed very little change (.08). It is interesting to note that the second post-test levels of both the dualists and multiplists are still above their pre-test level of perceived effectiveness, while the transitional group scored slightly below their pre-test level.

"Self" assessments. Comparison of the self scale between groups and across the pre-test and post-tests yields similar results to the group scale although not as dramatic. Once again it was the dualists that showed the greatest increase immediately following the experience (M = 3.73 to M = 4.44). All three groups showed a decrease between the first and second post tests as was hypothesized although the multiplistic group had the smallest change (-.08) and in effect stayed the same. Again the dualist group showed a drastic decrease between post-tests.

Program evaluation. In comparing means between the three groups on the evaluations completed immediately following the Group Challenge Experience (administered in the vans on the drive home that day) we found that the dualists and the multiplists scored their evaluations approximately the same (M = 4.50) and significantly higher than the transitional group (M = 4.07).

Assumptions and Limitations

Since the focus of this study was on the cognitive ability of the subjects one of the biggest assumptions made was that cognitive functioning plays a major role in this type of learning experience. We were not able to take into consideration other elements (such as psychosocial, environmental and physical effects) that may have had an impact on the interaction within the groups.

Results and Discussion

We had anticipated the perceived effectiveness of the groups to increase for all three groups immediately following the event. We found this to be true of only two of the groups. The transitional group actually experienced a slight decrease in perceived effectiveness. This could be attributed to the difficult time this group had in working with one another during the event.

Subjective comments from the transitional group (in response to the evaluation section calling for the "worst thing about the experience") included "There were a few problems with communication—people not listening to other people's ideas, and negative attitudes!" and "We had a difficult time working together as a group." This aptly characterizes behavior you would expect from this transitional level.

There were no other negative comments on the evaluations (outside of complaints about the cold weather) from subjects other than those in the transitional group. It seems as if this group had the least positive experience an it reflected that consistently throughout the assessments.

The original hypothesis behind this study was for like cognitive thinkers to be grouped together for challenges to give them a maximum opportunity for success through common viewpoints. After shared experiences with like thinkers, they would then be mixed with groups from other levels to experience a cross section of thought such as exists in groups in the real world. The result was expected to be an improved ability to deal with different types of thinking, and to improve relations and abilities to get things done within the group. That result was not the conclusion of this study.

Perhaps the most significant finding was that all people are not automatically "improved" by group development exercises, especially when they are at a certain transitional level of cognitive development. While most groups are actually diverse, both cognitively and otherwise, this effect might not manifest itself so clearly in most group situations.

Because this study isolated individuals in groups of like cognitive levels, the results were

somewhat more obvious. The implications of this are critical for facilitators of groups, and allowance for different responses by participants must be taken into account. It should be noted that the majority of the tabulated results and the subjective information collected in the form of personal comments and suggestions clearly shows that these activities had a positive impact on the majority of the participants.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

It is unclear to us if this study represents ground-breaking research in the adventure field, but it has certainly stimulated our appetite for additional research about human development. An obvious suggestion for future research along these lines of cognitive development would be to have a larger sample for the study, and see if these findings would be replicated. Another suggestion would be to include a mixed, diverse group of cognitive levels (as most groups actually are) to act as a control for the study. Would the diversity within that group simply "average out" and be affected negatively by the oppositional transitional thinkers within?

According to Perry, individuals can and should be encouraged to move on to other positions within his model of cognitive development. This can be accomplished by challenging the individual with ideas from higher levels. Thus, to help people develop, they should be challenged with ideas, structure, and language from higher levels and then supported with positive feedback. If they have just arrived at a position, confirmation should take place, where the facilitator makes confirming statements about that level that will reinforce and confirm the individual's thinking at that level.

In conclusion, the concept of Adequateness re-emerges to remind us of an individual's capacity to understand something, and it particularly applies to the concept of challenge and support. Because "the understand of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known" individuals may escape or retreat or temporize if the challenge of development is too great. At the other extreme, they may not grow or be challenged enough if too much nurturing support is given. This is especially important for facilitators to understand. It also adds a new dimension to the type of training they may require to be able to fully facilitate the growth and development of individuals within their groups. If nothing else, it may help to make them aware of why Johnny —or Joanie—or other members within their group can't cooperate.

Jim Fullerton is the Coordinator of Outdoor Recreation at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which includes the Outdoor Adventures program and Group Challenge Experience. He has organized outdoor adventure programs for five organizations since 1977, and has backpacked and climbed on four continents, visiting 30 countries along the way. With a bachelor's degree in Journalism and a Master's degree in Public Administration (outdoor recreation emphasis). He is beginning work on a doctorate degree in an interdisciplinary combination of adult education, educational psychology and human development. He encourages everyone to take reasonable risks and to full explore the adventure of life.

Sue Wells works with the Campus Activities and Programs Office at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Endnotes

[1]A book called *Why Johnny Can't Read—and What You Can Do About It* was published in 1955. In 1981 the same author wrote a follow-up called *Why Johnny Still Can't Read: A New Look at the Scandals of Our Schools*. Over the years other authors have borrowed from the now-famous original title for variations on the theme. In this tradition of identifying education concepts that may need attention, "Why Johnny Can't Cooperate" seemed an appropriate title for this paper. In light of the fact that the subjects in this research study were women, it might have been even more appropriate for the title to be "Why Joanie Can't Cooperate"!

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Code_____

GROUP CHALLENGE EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT

Every group is made up of individual members. This instrument will attempt to measure your perception of your group's effectiveness and your personal effectiveness within the group on a number of dimensions defining the concept of "team". The dimensions we have used to define "team" are presented in four categories--Communication, Relationships, Vision and Leadership. The second section of this assessment measures your satisfaction level.

Instructions: Please consider your group's effectiveness and also your personal effectiveness on each of the items in the four categories. A score of 5 indicates high effectiveness, group/self is effective always or the majority of the time; 3 indicates moderate effectiveness, group/self is effective some of the time; 1 indicates ineffectiveness, group/self is never effective.

I. EFFECTIVENESS LEVEL:

	Group	Self
COMMUNICATION		
Giving positive feedback (GF)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Receiving feedback (RF)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Problem solving (PS)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Decision making (DM)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Conflict resolution (CR)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
RELATIONSHIPS		
Tolerance of individual differences (TD)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Cooperation on tasks (CT)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Development of support networks (SN)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Ability to overcome stress and frustration (OS)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Respect for others (RO)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Scale: 1-ineffective, never effective
3-moderate effectiveness, sometimes effective
5-high effectiveness, always, usually effective

	Group	Self
VISION		
Clear goals and objectives (CG)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Willingness to take risks (TR)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Sense of purpose (SP)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Sense of direction/focus (SD)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Take advantage of opportunities presented (AO)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
LEADERSHIP		
Commitment/Dedication (CD)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Confidence (CN)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Energy/Enthusiasm (EE)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Competence (CM)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Feeling of significance (FS)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Use the following scale to rate your level of satisfaction:
1-very dissatisfied, 3-satisfied, 5-very satisfied

II. **SATISFACTION LEVEL:**

Overall, how satisfied are you with your group's effectiveness? (GE) 1 2 3 4 5

Comments on above:

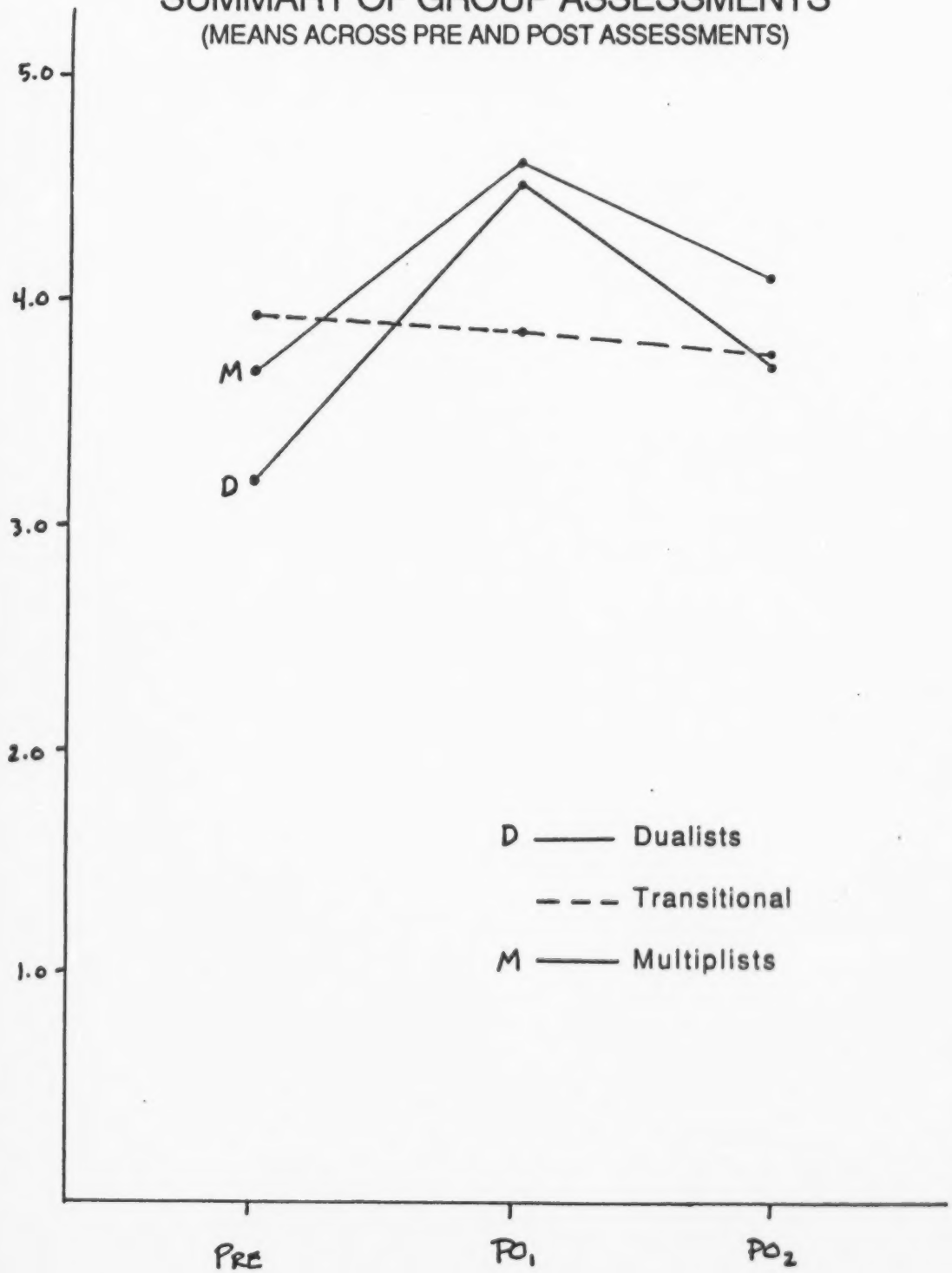
Overall, how satisfied are you with your own personal effectiveness within your group? (PE) 1 2 3 4 5

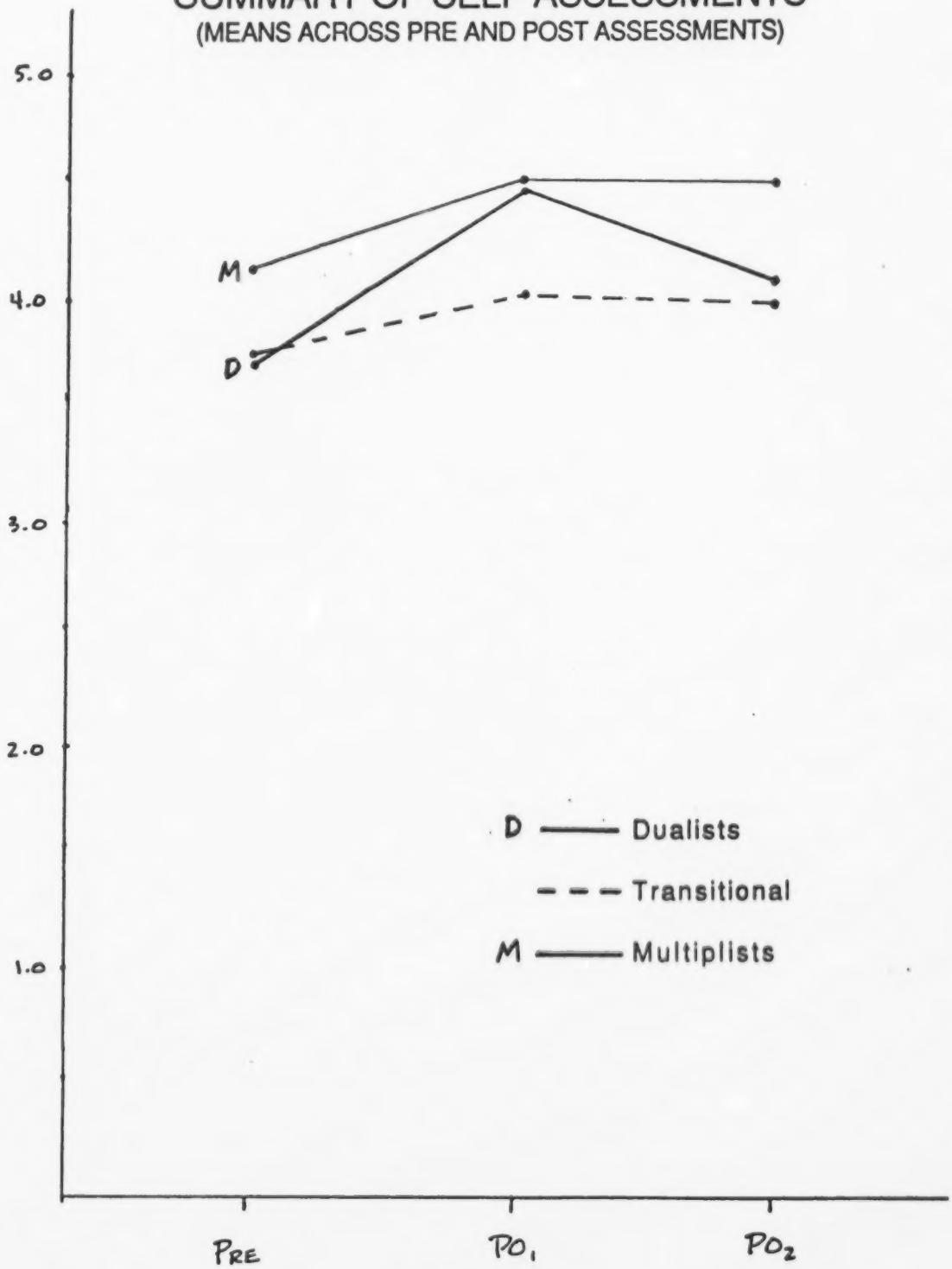
Comments on above:

GROUP CHALLENGE EXPERIENCE
PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT OF KEY FACTORS

	PROBLEM SOLVING	DECISION MAKING	CONFLICT RESOLUTION	TOLERANCE OF DIFFERENCES	COOPERATION ON TASKS	RESPECT FOR OTHERS
GROUP #1 (Dualists)						
PRE	3.29	3.14	3.29	3.00	2.86	3.29
POST 1	4.86	4.43	4.29	4.00	4.71	4.57
POST 2	3.71	3.86	3.43	3.71	4.14	3.57
GROUP #2 (Transition)						
PRE	3.63	3.75	3.38	3.75	3.88	3.88
POST 1	3.75	3.50	3.88	3.38	3.75	3.50
POST 2	3.63	3.63	3.63	3.63	3.63	3.75
GROUP #3 (Multiplists)						
PRE	3.63	3.75	3.50	4.13	3.63	3.63
POST 1	4.63	4.63	4.63	4.75	4.75	4.50
POST 2	4.00	4.00	3.75	4.25	4.25	4.00

GROUP CHALLENGE EXPERIENCE
SUMMARY OF GROUP ASSESSMENTS
(MEANS ACROSS PRE AND POST ASSESSMENTS)




GROUP CHALLENGE EXPERIENCE
SUMMARY OF SELF ASSESSMENTS
(MEANS ACROSS PRE AND POST ASSESSMENTS)
5.0
4.0
3.0
2.0
1.0
M
D
D —— Dualists
- - - Transitional
M —— Multiplists
PRE
PO1
PO2

POST-EVENT COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

DUALISTIC GROUP--operates out of "compartmentalized" absolutes (right/wrong/ good/bad, black/white, strong/weak), conforms, everyone is same as me.

"The weather was kinda cold. Put a damper on some people's spirits--but not my group!"

"It made me feel really good to work with my group and accomplish everything."

TRANSITIONAL GROUP--beginning to see there is more than one way to do things, confused, actively oppositional (defines self by opposing others).

"Sometimes individuals were too negative."

"There were a few problems with communication--people not listening to other people's ideas, and negative attitudes!"

"I got upset when 5 people would try to tell everyone what to do all at the same time."

"Some people in my group started getting bad attitudes towards the end."

"My small group experience wasn't as uplifting as large group activities."

MULTIPLISTIC GROUP--sees validity in other people's perspectives, empathetic.

"We functioned well as a team and each of us helped and encouraged another."

"The best thing was interacting and cooperating to solve problems to reach our goals."

"I think our small group worked really well together. Each person was given the opportunity to give input; everyone did and everyone listened. Then we used the best ideas and we all tried--no one didn't try!"

"I didn't feel like we pulled all the separate groups back into one at the end to evaluate how all 23 people were affected as a whole unit."